

# University Report

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UNIVERSITY REPORT

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COSMO PIETERSE:  
NARRATOR -

This week, a departure somewhat from normal. A leading political scientist from East Africa gives his analysis of the recent military coup in Uganda and a survey of some of its implications not only for Uganda but for East Africa generally; in addition, we report, briefly, some student reaction to the coup.

The coup itself happened on Monday, 25th January, 1971 when, while returning from the Commonwealth Conference in Singapore, Dr. Milton Obote, President of the Republic of Uganda, learned that he has been deposed. The army leader, General Amin, had taken power and instituted a new military government.

Dr. Obote, whose party had ruled Uganda since 1962, landed at Nairobi in Kenya. From there he soon flew to Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania. By Friday 29th January, General Amin's position as Uganda's new President seemed unchallenged in Uganda itself, but over the weekend speculation and questions were rife. Had the coup been necessary? What would happen to nationalisation in Uganda? And to the growing trend towards forms of socialism in East Africa? Did the military coup strike a blow for freedom?

These are all questions that Professor Mazrui will be considering a little later - plus one other. Will the coup affect academic freedom in Uganda? But first

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some general university/student reaction to it, and some of its implications. From Kampala a correspondent sent us this report - which Gwyneth reads for us now.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

To begin with Makerere ignored the gunfire, which first told Kampala something was happening. On Monday morning most of the students turned up as usual for lectures. But as the gunfire increased lectures were suspended and everyone returned to their rooms to listen to the radio. At 4.30 the military take-over was announced and immediately the campus began to resound with shouts of joy and ululating from the student halls of residence. But one has to remember many of the students are Baganda, and so the announcement which included news that political detainees were to be released and exiles allowed back, would affect many of their families and friends directly. After the initial out-burst the campus quietened down and on Tuesday everyone was back in the classroom.

Then it was on Thursday that student approval was made official through the General Assembly of the Makerere students union, which overwhelmingly passed an eight point resolution pledging support for General Amin's take-over - amongst other things they recognised the coup as "a truly popular revolution" and welcomed General Amin's proposal that "in future political activity will be based on a free choice of political parties, and freedom of expression". This second point is one that has particular meaning for staff and students at Makerere, since it's been widely known that some students and others had been spying on both staff and students and reporting back to Dr. Obote's government. Of course individuals concerned with spying are well known - but there has been no victimisation of them since the coup - they are simply despised and ignored. And so on the whole, subtly and

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undramatically, the atmosphere at Makerere has changed - there is more talk, more laughter, a feeling rather of relief, and much talk of great hopes for the future.

COSMO PIETERSE:

The report indicates relief, hope, joy. But are these feelings general - Professor Mazrui, Professor of Political Science at Makerere University, sees the new situation after the coup in this light:

PROFESSOR MAZRUI:

The present regime says it intends to re-open the society, and have greater flexibility, and expression, a greater openness of competition and debate. Some of the people they have in their Cabinet or Council of Ministers are of the kind that do share this belief in an open society. Some of the people that Amin is using may not be inspired by socialistic values, but they are certainly inspired by liberal ideals.

COSMO PIETERSE:

Professor Mazrui's use of the term <sup>'régime'</sup> ~~here~~ is in the sense of 'government' with no unfavourable association to it, similarly his use later of the word 'bureaucracy' carries no undertones: in its context it will mean simply 'the civil service'. But to return to the coup itself, the violent, though in the Ugandan case relatively bloodless overthrow of a government.

As it is, in the last ten years, independent African countries have experienced at least twenty coups. Hence the point that Robin White next puts to Professor Mazrui.

ROBIN WHITE:

Professor Mazrui, there have been arguments that the coup in Uganda was yet another example of Africa's failure to change its leadership without violence. Would you go along with this?

PROFESSOR MAZRUI:

No, I wouldn't go along with that. It does illustrate Africa's failure to have adequate restraints on its soldiers of course, but that follows almost without saying from the phenomenon itself. But Obote was going to have elections when all is said and done. He had embarked on specific steps towards having a new electoral scheme implemented, the expectation was that it would be implemented by April this year. We in the Department of Political Science at Makerere had already been given a substantial grant of money by Obote's government to study the elections. Secondly, some initial steps towards implementing the new electoral scheme like providing the Chairmans for constituencies has already been fulfilled.

Many of our students were going round the country explaining this scheme to the illiterate. I think it was quite credible that the man intended to have elections by April; though the military regime is rather sceptical that Obote was serious about this. Now if Obote has implemented this, we don't know. If the elections were to be free we could have changed the government in Uganda without violence. So the military coup cannot be fully rationalized in terms of providing change without which no change would have taken place. If it had taken place in 1969, this would have been defensible as a proposition, because no decision to hold an election had as yet been taken, and Obote had been there in power since 1962. But in 1971 it is difficult to pursue that line of argument as rationalization of the coup.

ROBIN WHITE:

President Nyerere has argued that change is possible within a one-party state, in that, one party can represent everybody because there are no classes in Africa, Africa is a classless society. Do you think this is any longer true in that new classes like 'educated elite' and 'poor peasant' or 'politician' and 'soldier' might be emerging?

PROFESSOR MAZRUI:

Now if Nyerere was addressing Ugandans on that theme, many of them would have chuckled because they knew there were classes in Uganda, a number of their communities have had kingdoms, aristocracies, and it was just not adequately meaningful to say 'traditional African arrangements did not have classes'. But in Tanzania it is true that cleavages, and the class stratification was not as sharp as it was in Uganda and it sounded more persuasive to his people. It is in any case true that new classes are emerging, he himself is committed to the proposition that any tendency towards the emergence of capitalistic classes should be strongly resisted in the country.

But I don't myself believe that major economic changes in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda can take place without also affecting the nature of class relations. In other words, you can't have economic development, and growth in the countries and hold the class component constant, so that that remains unchanging, it's impossible. The price of certain forms of development must include the emergence of the new types of classes. The big decision to be faced is whether the emergence of these classes should be permitted to include very great disparities in privileges between the groups, in other words, you can have classes and they can be unequal, but they must not be too unequal in their advantages and privileges they enjoy.

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Now Obote's government was rather torn on this issue, because on the one hand there was this talk of socialism and nationalisation, on the other, there was the phenomenon of the Trade Licensing Act, specifically designed to create an indigenous business class, to replace the Asian component of Uganda's commercial sector as rapidly as possible. So you have socialism as a policy on the one hand, and the indigenization or the Ugandanization of business on the other going side by side. The latter couldn't but create a new class structure in the society.

ROBIN WHITE:

You were talking about African socialism. Do you see this coup being a set-back to the socialism that Zambia, Uganda and Tanzania seem to be moving towards?

PROFESSOR MAZRUI:

I believe so. The soldiers who took over power are not radical, in the sense that the soldiers in the Sudan have been recently. There are no strong links with radical or socialistic forces in Uganda. But in any case, socialism in Uganda was very much limited to a small group of people under the leadership of Obote. It may well have been, if Dr. Obote had remained in power long enough he might have converted more and more of his countrymen to socialism. But as on 25th January 1971, when he was overthrown, there was no seething socialistic restlessness at the grass roots in Uganda, it was very much a leadership phenomenon. It could have found a greater foundation if Dr. Obote had remained in power much longer.

The new people, however, some of them are people of integrity and are people of ideas, but they're just different ideas. Some of them are not socialists they are liberals, they really believe in the more

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standard values of freedom of expression, greater individual initiative and enterprise, greater openness in the society, greater utilization of the courts as distinct from preventive detention. So it isn't as if there is a disappearance of ideals in Uganda, it's just that the socialistic ideals are at the moment over-shadowed and, some liberal ideals may be finding a new lease of life. The soldiers themselves may be unsure what type of political ideals ought to be championed, they are primarily soldiers rather than political theorists, political philosophers or politicians. But those that they are recruiting into the ranks of decision makers, are substantially people who are either bureaucratically inclined, or inspired by liberal rather than radical ideals.

ROBIN WHITE:

A couple of years ago there was a certain amount of trouble in Uganda over the publication of the magazine 'Transition'. Do you think now that Dr. Obote has gone, academic and journalistic freedom, might be greater?

PROFESSOR MAZRUI:

Well, I'd like to hope so. It is true that under Obote, freedom of expression progressively declined in Uganda. That there was a time when you had a very vigorous political system, a very vigorous magazine, very inspiring journalism, although of a non-sophisticated kind, it was free and fairly vigorous. And Makerere was, of course, one of the most important university institutions in the third world as a whole. Now under him some of these areas of openness began to close under Obote. The present regime says that it intends to re-open the society and have greater flexibility in expression and greater openness of competition and debate. Some of the people they have in their Cabinet or Council of Ministers are of the

PROFESSOR MAZRUI: kind that do share this belief in an open society. I said, that some of the people that Amin is using may not be inspired by socialistic values, but they're certainly inspired by liberal ideals. And if their ideals do influence the actual course of events in Uganda, you may have a more open society. But at the moment, because it is a military regime, there is a sense of inhibition of cautiousness, and it's understandable. The big question is "Is the sense of inhibition and cautiousness the real indication of things to come?" or "Is this simply an interval until new elections are held and Uganda once again becomes, the liberal political system it once was?"

COSMO PIETERSE: Professor Ali Mazrui - Head of Makerere's Department of Political Science on a recent short visit to London talking to Robin White. And how good it is to hear a political scientist talking about real political events as they are happening - I could wish it happened more often.

But there we have to leave it I'm afraid, so as usual until the next time from me Cosmo Pieterse it's good-bye for now.